

International Education: Latin America's Toltecs and Ancient America's Anasazís

This lesson can take anywhere from two days to an additional period of one or two weeks with the extended activities.

I. Content:

I want my students to understand (or be able to):

- A. The significant architectural achievements of ancient civilizations.
- B. The historical similarities of Ancient America's Anasazís and Latin America's Toltecs.
- C. How early civilizations adapted to their environment and surroundings.

II. Prerequisites:

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student must know (or be experienced in):

Comparing and contrasting the impact of European exploration on the native population in the Americas. (See U.S. History I, Block 1, Course of Study Guide.)

III. Instructional Objective(s):

The student will:

Compare and contrast the development of the Anasazi and Toltec people and how their environment and political climate led them to create unique, new building ideas.

IV. Materials and Equipment

Teacher: Lesson Packet

Student: Student Handouts (#1 and #2)

Background information on Toltec and Anasazi peoples.

Modeling clay or some other building materials for the creation of ancient structures.

V. Instructional Procedure:

- A. Introduce students to the lesson by showing pictures of the Anasazi Ruins.
www.nps.gov/meve/cliff_dwelling/cliff_dwelling_home.htm
- B. Discuss with students how many ancient peoples incorporated unique building procedures to adapt to their environment.
- C. Create two groups of students. Assign one group of students to read background information on "Toltecs–Master Builder" (Student Handout #1),

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assign the second group to read background information on “Ancient Anasazís” (Student Handout #2).

- D. Assign student reflections on the rise and fall of their group.
- E. Create pairs of students from each of the two groups. Allow each person in the first group's pair to teach the second group's pair about the civilisation they studied and vice versa.

Pair teaching allows students the opportunity, in a non-threatening way, to teach what they have learned to another student in the classroom.

- F. Divide students into two groups and assign each group to create a model of either the Anasazi Chaco Canyon Great Houses or the Toltec capital of Tula.
- G. Have students share projects with the class and their interpretation of the relationship between the two cultures.

VI. Assessment / Evaluation:

Student presentations will allow assessment and evaluation.

VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

- 6-12.USH1.1.5.2 Identify significant countries and their roles and motives in the European exploration of the Americas.
- 6-12.USH1.1.5.3 Analyze and describe the interactions between native peoples and the European explorers.
- 6-12.USH1.1.5.4 Summarize the major events in the European settlement of North America from Jamestown to the end of the 18th century.
- 6-12.USH1.2.1.1 Develop and interpret different kinds of maps, globes, graphs, charts, databases and models.
- 6-12.USH1.2.2.1 Explain ways in which people responded to their physical environment in the early national history of the United States.

VIII. Follow Up or Extension Activities:

- A. Students can research other ancient civilizations and their rise and fall.
- B. Students can create maps detailing the location of the Anasazi and the Toltec people.

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- C. Students can read Challenge the Wind by Christine Echeverria Bender. Boise: Writer's Press, 2000, and respond with journal entries.
- D. Students can view *More Than Bows and Arrows*, videocassette (52 minutes): sd. Col., ½ in. Produced by Camera One (Seattle, WA) c1994. ISBN: 1560570156.
- E. Students can research the impact of European exploration on each of these cultures.
- F. Students can research the architectural wonder of the creations of each of these groups.

Student Handout #1 – “Toltecs-Master Builders”

Toltecs-Master Builders



The Toltecs ruled much of Maya central Mexico from the tenth to twelfth centuries A.D. The Toltecs were the last dominant Mesoamerican culture before the Aztecs, and inherited much from Mayan civilization. The Toltec capital was at Tula, 80 kilometers north of Mexico City. The most impressive Toltec ruins, however, are at Chichen Itza in Yucatan, where a branch of Toltec culture survived beyond the civilization's fall in central Mexico.

The Toltecs were Nahuatl-speaking people who held sway over what is now central Mexico from the 10th to the 12th century AD. Their name has many meanings: an "urbanite," a "cultured" person, and, literally, the "reed people," derived from their urban centre, Tollan ("Place of the Reeds"), near the modern town of Tula, about 50 miles (80 km) north of Mexico City. About AD 900 they sacked and burned the great city of Teotihuacan under the leadership, according to tradition, of Mixcoatl ("Cloud Serpent").

Under his son, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, they formed a number of small states of various ethnic origins into an empire later in the 10th century.

They also were noted as builders and craftsmen and have been credited with the creation of fine metalwork, monumental porticoes, serpent columns, gigantic statues, and carved human and animal standard-bearers. Beginning in the 12th century the invasion of the

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nomadic Chichimec destroyed the Toltec hegemony in central Mexico. Among the invaders were the Aztec, or Mexica, who destroyed Tollan about the mid-12th century.

Whether it was imposed on them or adopted by choice, the fact that the Maya of Chichen Itza incorporated so much of Toltec culture is significant. Although no absolute connection has been established, the emergence of Kukulcan, the Mayan version of the feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl, coincided with the height (or possibly the collapse) of the Toltec civilization. The legend of the priest-king Quetzalcoatl of Tula and his self-imposed banishment to the East have been frequently linked to the emergence of the Mayan god Kukulcan and the assimilation of Toltec culture at Chichen Itza. Feathered rattlesnake images are everywhere at Chichen Itza.

The pyramid of El Castillo (so named by the Spanish) is so aligned that the sun rises over one of its corners at the summer solstice and sets over another at the winter solstice. Each of its four sides has 91 steps, with a common stair that circles the entire pyramid at the top for a total of 365, the number of days in the solar year. On the days of the spring and fall equinoxes, a pattern of sunlit triangles is formed on the edge of the northern balustrade that suggests the image of a snake slithering down the pyramid as the sun moves across the sky. Thousands of modern Maya, along with a like number of tourists, crowd the plaza to watch this occurrence every year.

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TULA



Towards the end of the Classic period, various waves of northern invaders came to Mesoamerica. One of these was the Purepecha or Tarascan people who settled around the lakes of the modern-day state of Michoacan. However, of all the recently arrived groups, the most important was the Toltec people of Tula.

The invading Toltecs mixed with the people living in the valleys of the present-day state of Hidalgo and, around the year 1050, transformed Tula into a great city, the capital of an empire, which dominated the center of Mexico and spread its influence to very distant areas.



The Toltec, according to the historical annals, built the first great empire in Meso-America.

At the height of its splendor, Tula had around 40,000 inhabitants who practiced agriculture by means of small systems of dams and canals, since rain was scarce in the

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area. It would seem that related families built their houses next to one another and separated them from the outside world with walls.

The ceremonial center of Tula has pyramids, rooms and ball courts. The site is characterized by the great warrior figures known as Atlantes (see picture below).



Not only did the Toltecs spread their influence by means of war, but also through trade. In Tula, as in Teotihuacan, they worked obsidian and made ceramics. Their artisans were famous for producing the most beautiful and complicated objects in Mesoamerica.

Tula also called Tollan, was the ancient capital of the Toltecs in Mexico; it was primarily important from about AD 900 to about 1200. Although its exact location is not certain, an archaeological site near the contemporary town of Tula in Hidalgo state has been the persistent choice of historians. Some scholars, however, are reluctant to accept this identification, preferring the site of Teotihuacán near Mexico City.

The archaeological remains near contemporary Tula are concentrated in two clusters at opposite ends of a low ridge. Recent surveys indicate that the original urban area covered at least three square miles and that the town probably had a population in the tens of thousands. The major civic centre consists of a large plaza bordered on one side by a five-stepped temple pyramid, which was probably dedicated to the god Quetzalcóatl. Other structures include a palace complex, two other temple pyramids, and two ball courts. Another large civic centre stands at the opposite end of the ridge.

The main temple pyramid and its associated structures epitomize the stylistic characteristics of Tula architecture. Though small, the pyramid was highly decorated. The sides of the five terraces were covered with painted and sculptured friezes of marching felines and canines, of birds of prey devouring human hearts, and of human faces extending from the gaping jaws of serpents. A stairway on the southern side led to a

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highly ornamented, two-room temple at the summit. The front room was supported by four columns in the form of erect, stiffly posed warriors, each 15 feet (4.58 m) high and adorned with a series of highly specific body ornaments and accoutrements representative of the Tula style.

Attached to the southern base of the pyramid was another feature of Tula architecture-- great colonnaded masonry hallways with flat roofs supported on scores of masonry columns.

Separated from the main temple pyramid by a narrow alley are the partial remains of what may have been the palace of the ruler of Tula. The excavated portions consist of three great halls. Each apparently had a low bench placed along the interior walls (with projecting thrones at the midpoints), a central sunken light well, and great numbers of columns for support of the flat wood and masonry roof.

In general, the art and architecture of Tula show a striking similarity to that of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, and the artistic themes indicate a close approximation in religious ideology and behaviour. In fact, many scholars believe that the Aztecs' concept of themselves as warrior-priests of the sun god was directly borrowed from the people of Tula.

Around the year 1170, the city and its ceremonial center were ransacked and partially destroyed.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/toltecs.html>

Student Handout #2 – “The Ancient Anasazi”

The Ancient Anasazi

Originating in Asia, the first people came to what is now the American Southwest about 10,000 years ago. These hunters and gatherers were constantly on the move. The climate was cooler and wetter then, so big game like mammoths and buffalo could be hunted.

After 5,000 B.C., the climate changed. It became warmer and drier. When the herds of animals migrated north, the people adapted by gathering more wild plants to eat. The climate changed again, and some animals, such as deer, returned. With meat adding to the great diversity of wild plant foods in their diet, the population began to grow slowly. By 2000 B.C., the nomadic people had become too numerous for the available plant and animal resources. They had to find some new source of food.

Farming in a Dry Land

Sometime after 2000 B.C., traders from Mexico brought a primitive type of corn into the Southwest for the people to cultivate. Later, the people planted squash and beans that also originated from Mexico.

Thus, the agricultural revolution came to the Southwest. Families increasingly stayed in one place where they grew most of their food. These people became the Anasazi farmers, who would dominate the Southwest for the next 3,000 years.

The Anasazi built villages made up of pit houses. These were circular structures built partly or entirely underground. As the villages got bigger, the Anasazi built an additional large pit house for community gatherings and religious ceremonies. The Anasazi believed that they had originated from underground beings who emerged at sacred openings from the underworld.

By A.D. 900, the Anasazi had learned to make clay pots. This revolutionized their cooking, allowing them to more easily make stews and corn cakes.

The Anasazi started building aboveground square or rectangular houses made of sandstone blocks and wood. Each family constructed a house that adjoined that of another family in a row or arc. The Spanish would later call this group of connected homes a pueblo. Usually, each pueblo had one or more kivas.

The improved lives of the Anasazi drove up their population, especially in what is now the San Juan River Basin of northwest New Mexico. The growing population forced the Anasazi to build more pueblos further away from the few year-round rivers in the region. Increasing numbers of the Anasazi worked at “dry farming.” This meant that they depended on summertime rains to water their crops. In the years with summer rain,

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the farmers prospered. But in times of drought, the crops failed and their families faced starvation.

“The Chaco Phenomenon”

After A.D. 900, a new beneficial climate change took place, bringing predictable summer rains year after year. Crops grew in abundance. The population exploded throughout the Southwest. The number of Anasazi surged to about 100,000 people living in more than 10,000 pueblos.

A remarkable development started to take shape in what we now call Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico. The Anasazis constructed large multi-story buildings with hundreds of rooms that archaeologists later called “Great Houses.”

These were not just mud-brick structures. Anasazi masons carefully shaped and tightly fitted sandstone blocks to make the walls. Archaeologists estimate that the Anasazis cut down 215,000 trees from forests 30-40 miles away to make the floors and roofs of 12 Great Houses at Chaco Canyon.

Pueblo Bonito, as archaeologists call it today, was the largest of the Chaco Canyon Great Houses. It included 700 rooms in five stories plus more than 30 kivas. The building contained some living space, but the Anasazi used more than half the total rooms for storing food. One “Great Kiva” was over 50 feet in diameter and 12 feet deep. The Anasazi built about 100 more Great Houses throughout the countryside. They then constructed over 400 miles of straight 30-foot wide roads that connected most of the Great Houses to Chaco Canyon.

The roads are somewhat of a mystery. The Anasazi had no horses or wheeled vehicles. Archaeologists suspect the Anasazi may have used the roads to carry tree timbers, expand trading, and assist people on spiritual journeys.

During this period of favorable climate, successful crops, increasing population, and great building projects, little warfare seems to have taken place. Archaeologists call this time in Anasazi history “The Chaco Phenomenon.”

Archaeologists speculate that a group of warrior-priests from Mexico fled to Anasazi lands after the violent collapse of their own civilization. This group then took control of the peaceful Anasazi farmers and forced them to pay tribute of food and labor for building the Great Houses and road system.

The Pueblo People, as the Spanish called them, revolted in 1680. They killed hundreds of Spanish men, women, and children, and drove the surviving colonists out of the entire region.

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When the Spanish returned in the early 1700s, the Pueblo People did not resist. Instead, they adopted a peaceful way of life to prevent the Spanish from having any excuse to seize their few remaining lands. In 1706, the Spanish took a census and counted 18 pueblos with a total population of fewer than 7,000 people.

In 1848, the United States acquired the Southwest from Mexico. Today, the land of the ancient Anasazi is once again undergoing a severe drought. The Pueblo People still live in their homeland, mainly in New Mexico and Arizona. Their population is growing, but is only about half of what it was 850 years ago during the “Chaco Phenomenon.”